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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

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## CHALLENGING FRANK GARDNER

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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians

(*Section of the Library Association*)

Edited by W. G. Smith, Finsbury Public Libraries

VOL. 49. NO. 6

JUNE, 1956

## *Shocking Mess*

"The public library system in Lancashire is a complete mess." The speaker was Bernard Wray, County Librarian of Nottinghamshire, recalling some of his experiences in the North-West not long ago to a London meeting. Towns with a population of less than 5,000 have independent libraries and, when he was there, an indicator was in active use in one of them while in another a bookfund of £100 was administered by the Clerk of the Council. Past attempts to correct the position, said Mr. Wray, had resulted in expensive, messy, inefficient ad hoc schemes such as subject specialisation and regional bureaux.

Further evidence of the inefficiency of the many small independent libraries in this area is provided by a report *Library Co-operation in the North West*, issued at 1s. 6d. by the North-Western Regional Library System. It reveals in particular the shocking lack of bibliographies in libraries serving populations of under 30,000. Of 31 such towns, only 9 take the full *B.N.B.* service, while 7 do not take it at all. Six do not take the *Cumulative Book List* and none subscribe to the *C.B.I.* Fourteen have no holdings of any *Reference Catalogue* issued since 1930; not one of them has *Lewis's Catalogue* or the *World List of Scientific Periodicals*, 11 have no guides of any kind to Stationery Office publications, and 16 take neither *Willing's Press Guide* nor the *Newspaper Press Directory*.

Reasonable bibliographical self-sufficiency in all libraries is fundamental to regional efficiency. The Report recommends minimum bibliographical provision, but we wonder if the smaller libraries will take any notice; if anything but compulsion will correct their parasitical tendencies.

If a situation such as this existed in regard to children's education, the smaller authorities would very soon be forced to give up their powers. But education, if it is to be interpreted in the true spirit of the Education Act, is not something confined to children, and the efficiency of public libraries is vitally important to it. This Report, and common sense, indicates clearly that such efficiency cannot be obtained while the present jungle of small independent library authorities exists.

## **Challenging Frank Gardner**

A series of provocative remarks by Luton's Chief, Frank Gardner, was reported by your Editor in the April issue. Apathetic, examination-ridden assistants, branch libraries as opposed to mobiles, subject departments, general booklists, and library school students and Heads of Schools were among his targets. Assistants, Chiefs, library school students and Heads of Schools have all risen to his challenge, with the result that almost the whole of this issue is devoted to your replies.

## **Challenging Frank Gardner—1**

### **Municipal Libraries Section**

*"Was it not then absurd to push municipal librarians, the majority of the membership, into a section? . . . The present Branch structure works well and should not be disturbed. If a Municipal Libraries Section were formed, the A.A.L. would have to be abolished."*—FRANK GARDNER.

### **SWEARING BY THE CANONS**

H. TYERMAN, *Lancashire County*.

I do not think Mr. Gardner is right about a Municipal Section. The idea may seem cumbersome within the present structure, but is it not time that there was a complete revision? How does the present Branch structure work well, and why should it not be disturbed? I suggest that it is inefficient and that it is these very Branches which are unnecessary. The L.A. must be divided either by region or by interest, but not by both—is that not contrary to the canons of classification by which we swear? The call for more Sections during the past few years has proved interest to be the vital factor.

The need now is for a system of Sections based on special interest each divided regionally into workable areas. These would hold meetings as at present, but there should be more joint-meetings to make the profession aware of the problems in other fields. In such a system there is a clear need for the A.A.L. both as a co-ordinating body within each region and as the forum for assistants.

I think this would tidy up the present structure and be much more efficient. It would also bring to the membership a clearer understanding of the L.A. and its workings, and it would enable us to have a more streamlined method of election to Council.

### **OCCUPATIONAL MANIA**

DONALD DAVINSON, *Middlesbrough*.

So Mr. Gardner is prepared to join the ranks of those waving a tearful farewell to the A.A.L. in order that a Municipal Section might form. Abolition of the A.A.L. seems to be an occupational mania amongst Chief Librarians, one would almost think it was on its knees rather than going from strength to strength.

Mr. Gardner is right in essential, however, a Municipal Section must not be added to the present structure without some modification of the existing arrangements. Why not abolish the Branches? In their present form they are not working so well as Mr. Gardner seems to think, I am sure. Inspection of the L.A. year book shows that the present membership of the Branch Committee is almost exactly what one would expect to find on a Municipal Section Committee.

Abolish Branches, therefore, use their funds to form a Municipal Libraries Section nationally and locally, and then bring back the Branch committees but this time representing the various sectional interests present within an area and acting merely as a co-ordinating committee requiring only a fraction of the funds at present absorbed by the Branches.

## **Mobile or Branch Libraries**

*"There are overwhelming advantages in concentrating most books and facilities at a Central Library . . . large mobile libraries (instead of branches) provide popular reading with economy in staff, time and money."*—FRANK GARDNER.

### **BOOKS WITH THE GROCERIES**

W. BEST HARRIS, *City Librarian, Plymouth.*

I found myself largely in agreement with much of what Mr. Frank Gardner had to say during his interview with you, though I am completely opposed to his suggestion that "there are overwhelming advantages in concentrating most books and facilities at a Central Library." Statements of this kind can, unless they are related to the varying needs of varying towns, prove ideal ammunition for those who favour the restriction of our service to the minimum. I can imagine how delighted many Chairmen of Finance Committees would be to quote his view that mobile libraries are the answer for the provision of popular reading on housing estates.

I am going to ask, therefore, for a little of your space in order to examine the Central and Branch Library needs of any expanding town with a population of more than 75,000. I write this, incidentally, one month after opening a Central Library at Plymouth which is already issuing books at the rate of over 1,000,000 per annum and which is 95 per cent non-fiction in character.

The first problem facing any librarian of the type of town we have in mind is how to provide a service close enough to people's homes to encourage them to use it. If it is not close enough, then a very high percentage, and especially the younger ones, will not, and often cannot (by virtue of cost and distance) use the service. Mr. Gardner apparently accepts this premise up to a point, because he distributes books to new housing estates in vans.

There is a second problem, however, which should concern librarians, and that is the one of how far our branch library service can perform the active role of encouraging citizens to use libraries as collections of books, and not merely as places from which they draw their immediate reading needs. (I don't fancy, "One hundredweight of coal, 7 lbs. of potatoes and 2 library books—quickly, please, as I am getting wet standing out here in the rain"). We can, of course, reduce the work of our branches to the purely mechanical tasks of the issuing and return of books by putting everything into boxes on wheels, but I am afraid it is a point of view that ignores the purpose and benefits of a satisfactory presentation of our book stocks.

A Branch Library should, apart from offering a range of books, provide (a) conditions which encourage "browsing"—the most satisfying thing to see happening in any library; (b) an atmosphere and the facilities necessary to enable the staff and public to come together over the question of the choice of books as an event of intellectual significance; (c) the means of serving schools and other organisations in its area with a training ground in the use of libraries (reference section, catalogues, etc.); (d) service to the people of its area *when* those people need it. Using mobile vans, if you accept the last fundamental principle of any public service, each van could only serve one district and would be confined for 45–60 hours per week to that particular area! In other words, the vans

would not be mobile—assuming, as I say, that they are to serve citizens when they expect a service.

Many other points will, no doubt, occur to your readers, but the above will at least indicate how dangerously superficial is the view that a mobile collection of books is a reasonable economy when compared with the use of permanent buildings. Each offers an entirely different degree of service.

The answer seems to me to be that any expanding town should have mobile units for the use of those areas too isolated or too undeveloped to warrant permanent establishments. That, secondly, such a town should build sufficient small branches to ensure that every citizen had reasonable access to an establishment capable of providing the elements of a library service as described above, with not more than 1½ miles between units; and thirdly that, if the size of the town justifies it (say, 150,000 and over) then the small branch libraries should be supported at certain key points by the provision of a smaller number of *large* branches. Finally, the whole system, which I think of as the primary, secondary modern and grammar schools of the service, should be linked to their University—the Central Library—which should be designed and stocked accordingly.

## BOOK BUREAUCRACY

P. D. GANN, Gloucester County.

Mr. Gardner has left out so many details that it is impossible to compare the service of mobile libraries with branches, e.g., how long does the mobile stay at each service point; if stops are for short periods only does this mean that readers have to wait in exposed positions to "catch the bus"; does it operate in the evenings or must workers living in the new estates rely on their wives' choices; how often does it call; is the complete issue for all journeys carried in case readers visit it at stops other than their usual; are fines charged if a visit is missed; may books be reserved?

I do not know Luton, but it seems to me that a town of 110,000 would have enough business at its branches to justify a daily delivery service. If, in addition, each branch has a telephone and (better still) a union catalogue, it can give a central library service. With these facilities the disadvantages of having books shelved in different parts of the borough would be minimised, and the advantages would be less congestion, less travel for the reader and a better chance of seeing qualified staff.

Of course, readers used to modern bureaucracy would be impressed by having to travel to the centre of Luton and stand in a suppliant queue before being allowed a book! This and the untypical site have, no doubt, added to the library's prestige as did the top-hatted attendant at Liverpool referred to in a recent article by Mr. Savage!

I have no doubt that Mr. Gardner has forgotten more about librarianship than I have ever learnt—which makes me happy to agree with his last two provocative statements. I think that general booklists, i.e., lists of new books, only lead us into competition with commercial libraries—and what public library can afford to buy hundreds of copies of a potential best-seller to be ready on publication day? If we were to concentrate on the subject approach, I think that we would be called on to supply a high quality service, as has been the case in Western Australia.

On the last point, I would like to know *how* chiefs may be criticised. Editorials and semi-editorial features like *Valuations* may criticise printed publicity, which even if not actually offered, is fair game for review.

When other features of library service are attacked, the cry "unethical" is raised. It is significant that *Revaluations* was pseudonymous. Unless chiefs put themselves up as Aunt Sallies as Mr. Gardner has done, a set of rules would seem to be needed to prevent misunderstandings—perhaps the S.M.C.C.L. and the A.A.L. could issue a joint sode?\*

"If Assistants are going to run away at the first cry of "unethical," it is no wonder that Mr. Gardner thinks we are a timid race. Your editor does not think it unethical to criticise a person or a library, and is tired of the gutless euphemisms of our professional journals. He, of course, expects to be criticised in turn and will gladly provide space for opposing points of view.—Ed.

### Challenging Frank Gardner—3

## Apathetic Assistants

"Criticism is necessary to keep Chief Librarians on their mettle, and there is not enough of it to-day. . . . The thought of assistants to-day seems to be dominated by the examinations, and few seem interested in the broader aspects of librarianship."—FRANK GARDNER.

## OUR PRESENT DISCONTENTS

L. GREAVES, Derby.

Mr. Gardner infers that the controversy and vituperation of the thirties is lacking among our younger members to-day. I would go further and suggest that there is considerable discontent amongst library staffs which is, unfortunately, resulting in apathy rather than action. The reasons for this state of affairs would appear to lie in the Library Association, the conditions of working, and the staff themselves.

The first impression which a junior gains of the Library Association is that it is a body which exists solely in order to extract money for which he receives no tangible benefit. Later impressions are that the Association does not, as Mr. Gardner points out, further the interests of the profession by taking the lead in matters affecting the profession. This inactivity, particularly the lack of publicity given to the library service and library affairs, means the loss of potential support from outside the profession, and importance of publicity in this day and age cannot be over-estimated. The need for a Public Relations Officer cannot be minimised. It is deplorably true that large numbers of people have no idea at all of the potentialities of the library service and publicity at national level would help to remedy this and stimulate local effort.

The conditions of working are the result of the inability of the Library Association to insist upon minimum standards, conditions and salaries, and its lack of standing as an authority and representative of a profession. The junior is quick to realise the truth of the saying that the library service is the Cinderella of local government services. Further experience shows that inadequate staff (numerically as well as professionally) means that important aspects of library work, such as assistance to readers, must be ignored in order that the charging and discharging of books might continue. The quality of the staff is in turn a reflection of the conditions and the most promising staff is frequently attracted elsewhere.

That professional staff are dominated by an exam-consciousness cannot be disputed. To take the whole of the Registration Examination in one sitting, as was the original intention of the Library Association, even at library school calls for such intense concentration of the syllabus that wider aspects must be ignored.

## **BEING BROADMINDED**

LORNA STAGG, *Nottinghamshire County*.

No assistant possessing any initiative wishes to remain doing routine junior jobs for longer than he can help, and therefore is anxious to obtain the qualifications for a senior position as soon as possible.

Assistants' thoughts are dominated by examinations because these take up so much time. If the preparation is to be anything like thorough, a great deal of the time has to be spent studying and few hours are left for outside interests, let alone the broader aspects of librarianship. Does Mr. Gardner want us to be broadminded within our profession, only? How dull for the people we meet outside the library! There is a very real danger in becoming narrow-minded, and even anti-social, outside library circles, when practically all one's time is spent working in libraries and studying librarianship, part-time.

Even at library school it is absolutely impossible, when taking four parts of Registration, to cover all the reading one should. One has to be selective, and this usually means that the broader aspects are left. Believe me, we want to be broad-minded but how can we be, until the crowded syllabus is altered in some way?

*Challenging Frank Gardner—4*

## **What's Wrong with Library Schools?**

*"Assistants have a year devoted to study, yet often pass only one or two parts of the Registration Examination. Is there something wrong with the schools? This needs urgent investigation."—FRANK GARDNER.*

## **IF YOU WANT TO PASS, DON'T GO TO SCHOOL**

KEITH DAVISON, *Durham County*.

One of the principle reasons why people at library schools fail their examinations is that, unlike part-time students, they do not have an intense examination consciousness.

The library schools endeavour, fortunately, to take the broader view of librarianship. This, though very commendable, is not the way to examination success. To pass examinations, particularly at Registration Level, it is essential for students to be concerned with the "how" and not the "why" of librarianship. Any attempt by the student to take a broader view results in his "failing to answer the question" and consequently he does not pass.

As long as the L.A. examinations continue in their present pattern, library school students will continue to fail examinations.

## **DISILLUSION**

*Library Student, Cornwall County.*

As a present student, I ask myself "Why did I come to library school?" From outside it looks so simple—a whole year devoted to study. But the examination is designed, to all intents and purposes, to be taken one part at a time through a correspondence course. It is also true that the glamour of a year away from the lengthy hours of a lending library has some significance, but disillusion soon comes as the rigours of a one-year course leave little time for amusement.

The course involves much pure learning "by heart"—the illustration processes in bibliography, library law, dates of first editions, number of volumes, not forgetting four cataloguing codes and five classification schemes. As the year progresses it often appears too much and, to avoid failing hopelessly, one tends to concentrate on one or two parts.

Many of the schools appear to be ill-placed in either commercial or technical colleges. Invariably the library school is the smallest group and is pushed away into the smallest corner. Such facilities are, for an arduous course, completely and hopelessly inadequate. To have as many small schools in a profession such as ours appears to be completely uneconomic.

One-year students also have the difficulty of joining student bodies which generally cater for two, three or five-year students. Little force can be shown by library school representatives for adequate facilities when they are there only for a year and have an average of only 30 pupils, who often appear to other students to work all day, including lunch hours.

Far be it from me to criticise the teaching staff, but should we have tutors trained to lecture or practising librarians? At the moment we appear to fall between the two.

This may seem a little critical, but I do whole-heartedly agree with a full-time course. It gives one a broader view of the profession, the chance to see other systems, and the opportunity to talk and argue with other librarians. The only answer is one school, a two-year course, a revised examination syllabus, and a more thorough backing from the profession.

## **TOO MANY SCHOOLS**

**COLSTON H. HARTLEY.**

A basic problem is that we have too many, too small schools. We need schools with teaching staffs large enough to have each member dealing with only one subject, and free to give personal guidance to the students, which is not possible if the lecturer has to keep up with two or more subjects. With too many schools each will wish to maintain its numbers and may not therefore have such high selection standards as the examinations would warrant. With the inequality of L.E.A. grants we cannot be sure that the schools are getting all the best of the prospective students. Nor do all the libraries give their staff a good enough basic training before they go to the schools.

A question the profession should decide is how large an annual output of qualified staff is required from the schools, allowing for feminine "wastage." The question is obscured at the moment because we have not really tackled the problem of separating our staffs into "librarians" and others—not "professional" and "non-professional" because some libraries sadly need professional administrative and accounting staff. I suspect that the feminine "wastage" is aggravated in

public libraries by the inadequacy of the H.G.D. scales, so that girls who are performing useful work in libraries until they marry, but without any pretensions to making it a career, are chasing exam. qualifications (and subsequent salary increments) as the only means to a living wage. This imperative need to qualify for better salaries must be forcing many young candidates of both sexes to try their luck while far too immature for the examinations.

The question of lecturing on a syllabus set by someone else must wait on a decision about the recruitment of graduates. With the increase of university education, we may soon find it impossible to recruit from school-leavers the same calibre of people as have previously come straight into the profession. When this "stream" automatically progresses from school to university we shall have to recruit from graduates. Will the profession then be able to afford to wait for its entrants to graduate and then spend another year or two on library studies? We must make up our minds whether librarianship is to be a post-graduate subject or if we have to persuade the universities to institute a bachelor's degree in librarianship. Would such a degree be primarily in "applied bibliography" (in Irwin's term) with the libraries providing in-service training in the library "skills"?

We need to do much hard thinking before we can be satisfied with our library schools and our examinations. The easiest step might be the concentration on fewer, larger schools—if the authorities supporting the Colleges could afford this without Ministry support.

#### *Challenging Frank Gardner*

## **TOO MANY STUDENTS**

NEVILLE DAIN, *Head of Leeds Library School.*

I congratulate you on your editorial, which was far more interesting and informative than many of the vaporous articles with which the *Assistant* abounds. A new vigour seems to be radiating from the editorial chair.

Two subjects in the editorial aroused me. On one of them, "No subject departments," my comment is of the briefest. In spite of Mr. Gardner's past experience of a full public library service capable of supporting the most specialised and extensive enquiries in some subjects at least, he seems now to be adopting the outlook of the many librarians of comparatively small towns, who limit their views of our service to the provision of nice novels, and useful books for the uninformed and uninformable people in the street.

"What's wrong with Library Schools?" embodies some interesting and understandable reflections. His points there are not to be dealt with by a critical rejoinder because a librarian might expect that a suitably selected student should pass in more than "one or two parts" of the Registration Examination after a year's full-time course. I know nothing of his candidates and nothing of the courses rather surprisingly named, and am able to be neutral in my own remarks. Is Mr. Gardner sure that they were suitably selected candidates about whose results he is worried? Were they selected at all? Does he expect every student to pass the whole examination simply because a full-time course has been followed? Does he think that every worker in a library ought to pass the Registration Examination? What does he think is the purpose of the Registration Examination?

Having had nothing to do with the cases concerned, I will venture to

comment on my views and experience of education for librarianship. I have used the word "education" purposefully, and not "training," but unfortunately most chief librarians and probably all library authorities do not show evidence of accepting that there is a difference. As a teacher, I am not concerned with training students to hold a date stamp level, and am disinterested in the methods of reserving books, registering readers, recording fines, and recovering overdue books, amongst hundreds of minor routine subjects which are very important in daily practice, but which add no more to the extent and value of the library service than washing-up does to a banquet. Routine is the vital oil of the service—it is NOT the service, and at least in Leeds School of Librarianship it is subordinated in the general treatment of subjects. I am, of course, concerned with whether books should be reserved, and if so which ones, with which persons are entitled to be registered as readers, and on what terms, with whether fines should be charged, and with the economics of recovering overdue books, etc. Even those aspects of routine which I accept as within the scope of professional education are given minor treatment when compared with many other subjects.

I am not even suspecting Mr. Gardner of confusing the two, but I wonder if he sends to the schools candidates who are either not ready for professional education or who should be expected in some cases possibly to be trained in routine practice, and not to aspire to the higher posts demanding bibliographical or administrative skill. Before I enrol any candidate I find it necessary not only to interview each one, but also to inspect their written work. I do not look in the latter for knowledge of books or library practice, but for the ability to express ideas clearly and for rudimentary interest in the subject of the work. Even honours graduates are subjected to the same methods of selection, and not all of them have been accepted. We cannot claim to produce leaders of the profession, as the qualities of leadership are inherent, but we believe that if leadership lies in the individual's character it will be given a stimulus to emerge by full time education. We cannot produce the qualities of mind which lead to the performance of skilled bibliographical work, but we can foster and direct those qualities. We do not represent an effort to produce workers who are best suited to non-responsible routine work, and we do not believe that we can change such workers into the professionally capable. Much less can we expect to be able to push them through an examination. All that may beside the point, since all of Mr. Gardner's candidates may have been educationally and personally suited to the intensive and advanced studies which are inevitable if the Registration Examination is to be reached in two and a half terms.

That leads to a most important point, already realised, I believe, by Mr. Gardner. The material in the Registration Syllabus is far too extensive and detailed to be studied efficiently or adequately in one session of three terms. Two sessions lasting six terms are required for an adequate performance by teachers or students. Our machinery for full-time education was set up in an emergency after the last war. It became then urgently necessary to produce a plan for the schools of librarianship and for the examinations which would enable ex-Service librarians to obtain grants under the Further Education and Training provisions. Delay necessary to consult the profession as a whole, to consider the systems of other countries, and to compare librarianship with other professions, would have been likely to have disqualified librarianship as a subject for grants to ex-Service candidates. On the basis evolved, excellently in the circumstances, but immaturely, the full-time training for our librarians has proceeded.

Last year the students of this school were more successful than at any time since the immediately post-war two years. Yet thirteen failed to pass the whole Registration Examination out of 28 students on the two Registration courses. Ten did indeed pass the whole examination and five completed it. Are the results to be judged by the work of the unsuccessful or the successful candidates? I think that if the courses had lasted for two years, not only would nearly all of them have passed the whole examination, but all of them would have digested their lectures and reading. They would have finished the course with much more than success in the examination. I think that few of those who did in fact pass left with a clear grasp of the subjects or any knowledge that will remain with them unless they are fortunate in the opportunities which arise in their libraries to renew their acquaintance with some of the work done on the course. Frankly, I should dislike having to work at the pressure which I have found necessary for the task set before our Registration students if I were again a student.

If conclusions are of interest, mine are that Registration courses should last for two sessions, that fewer workers in public libraries should aim at becoming Chartered Librarians, and that those who do aim at the intermediate qualification dependent on the Registration Examination, should all pass through a full-time course.

### *Challenging Frank Gardner*

## **THOUGHTS OF A LIBRARIAN-EDUCATOR**

P. H. SEWELL,

*Head of the North-Western Polytechnic Library School, London.*

First an apology for the high-sounding title, "librarian-educator," but I want to emphasise my function rather than my institutional attachment.

I want to suggest that the British library profession should accept the fact that there is in it a place for the librarian educator. He is not a librarian taking a few years off from practice to help younger colleagues through their professional examinations. Neither is he a would-be pundit attempting to make weighty pronouncements remote from the turmoil of practical problems. As I see it he has a two-fold continuous task. On the one hand he must keep closely in touch with library policy, problems and methods, and analyse them as best he can in the light of what he can learn of current social, cultural and administrative trends. This gives him a continually modified standard of approach towards library practice. On the other hand he must set about subjecting his students to the impact of this set of professional concepts. To do this he needs some knowledge of teaching methods, a good deal of personal sympathy and understanding, and a firm belief in the contribution which librarianship has to make in building and maintaining a healthy and vital community.

The aim of the librarian-educator is, I submit, to get the young library assistant to base his acquisition of professional skills on a conception of librarianship as a whole. He must visualise to some degree the total impact of libraries of all types on the community at large, as well as the impact of his own library on his own community, be it town, factory or college. He should go further, and as he learns more of the structure and functioning of our society, be ready with suggestions for creating a library service more adequate for developing needs.

However, the effectiveness of the librarian-educator will very much depend on his dealings with the individual student. He usually finds little either of gross cynicism or laziness. More frequently he finds undeveloped mental powers and an unadventurous approach. The library student to-day has much more to build on than he had fifty years ago; conversely he has a much harder task in sorting out essentials.

Here I put forward the view that the dissemination of ideas through conference papers and articles has not always helped him. Most conference papers have, in addition to a few key ideas, much material, which fills in a pleasant half hour in a conference hall, but which yields little of use to a student. The L.A. might consider issuing summaries along with the full papers. Library periodicals too often "play to the gallery." Sometimes the columns of the *Assistant Librarian* suggest to me a narrow world where personalities and professional politics bulk large. I would like to see more thought-provoking articles which would help to enlarge the young assistant's understanding of his job.

The Librarian-Educator is concerned that the student shall learn to find his way with some confidence among his varied sources of professional information. For most young librarians this demands a hard, concentrated effort. Few can afford short cuts. With a two-year course, more sureness of judgment could be obtained, because the student would have time to work more with the primary materials of librarianship—examining more closely individual services and methods against the background of the community or institution served. As it is, Registration students have to concern themselves largely with secondary sources and pre-digested material.

One task is to convince students that the patient comprehension and assessment of facts and opinions is worth-while and will add up to something more valuable than the glib slogan or catchy phrase. At the same time we must try to keep him from absorbing a mass of unrelated facts which mean little to him and which diminish rather than increase his confidence in his own judgment. A background of experience in an active library service is valuable here.

Obviously, therefore, library schools need students of relatively mature years—22 years may be appropriate in many cases. They also need to be able to lighten the overweighted curricula of a nine-month Registration course. The prior study of a Group D Literature syllabus does something to help matters. Another procedure which is proving effective in terms of examination results is to take a twelve-month instead of a nine-month course. A student equipped with reasonable ability who comes to a Library School at the appropriate stage in his professional career, will find the year's course to be an effective educational experience. In view of the need to maintain professional standards, examination results are not entirely unsatisfactory—and statistics show that the general level of passes, including Brighton and North-Western Polytechnic, are a good deal higher than Mr. Gardner's experience suggests.

Meanwhile, the librarian-educator needs—and to a large extent gets—full co-operation from the profession. He will welcome contacts with librarians tackling new problems and using new methods. It will encourage him if practising librarians think that it might be worth having his opinion on certain matters under consideration, since he must in his work garner many facts and opinions. He will welcome constructive and informed criticism of his work, particularly when it is based on the recognition that he is performing an essential professional task which can be as rewarding as it is demanding.

**Challenging Frank Gardner**  
**LIBRARY SCHOOLS—A STUDENT'S VIEW**

JOAN M. COOPER, *North-Western Polytechnic.*

The idea that librarians should be specially educated for their profession is a comparatively recent one and the significance of that education is still under discussion, as indeed is the nature of librarianship itself. The vexed questions of professional and non-professional are all part of this question and so are the pitched battles fought between tutors and examiners. It is somewhat disquieting to be a student of a subject and find that not only are the experts in dispute about what should be taught, but that there are even doubts cast at the nature of the student himself, but we will try to examine what may be rather loftily called "the aims and ideals of education for librarianship."

Librarians are, as we know, required in many varying kinds of libraries, ranging from the national copyright libraries where the art of conservation is practised to the smaller active local libraries where the art of judicious discarding may be more to the point. Between these two are unnumbered specialist libraries and the great bulk of the public libraries. A librarian is required to exercise varied skills, apart from the obvious ones of his "mystery"—cataloguing and classification as well as bibliography. He will have to administer his staff and be wise and tactful in his dealings with the governing body of the library, to whom he is responsible. He will be expected to be knowledgeable and intelligent on most subjects under the sun and he must be fully aware of the purpose of the library and its place in society. His relations with the users of the library should make him conscious of the social purpose of the library for which he will be a guide and an interpreter, not the custodian of a dead museum piece. It follows that he must be a person of sound intelligence, must possess a good educational background and must be alert to the needs of the community. He should also be methodical and accurate and have administrative ability. Too often in the past, we fear the librarians have been of the shy, recluse type who regarded their work as a quiet, pleasant job in refined surroundings. Perhaps that type departed with the advent of open access!

So much for what librarians ought to be. How is the profession setting about educating its recruits to fit this ideal? Most of us know something of the history of that movement and the present position, where full-time schools, part-time classes and even correspondence classes exist side by side with the London University School of Librarianship which does not take the examinations of the professional body, but having had the advantage of earlier establishment prefers to make its own arrangements. The L.A. is in the position of being an examining body, but not a training one and so changes in the syllabus are built up, alas, on the failures of past students. It often seems that the syllabuses are a long way behind the latest thoughts and developments in the schools and only slowly and painfully is the gap shortened. The emphasis in much of the syllabus is on the acquisition of professional skills and techniques and one becomes conversant with an astonishing amount of professional jargon. A good deal of this technical knowledge deals with skills of other crafts which take men a lifetime to learn but which the would-be librarian is expected to describe adequately in half an hour. It must astonish very junior assistants to find that they have to consider in their organisation lectures librarianship from the point of view of a chief librarian and the paper often requires them to write on situations which they can never experience in their professional careers for many

years. In quite a few of the papers one feels that the purpose behind the test has not been fully realised and consequently the range of questions goes from the purely factual and mechanical to the type of discussion question which could well grace a degree paper.

For a long time the attitude has prevailed that librarianship is essentially a practical subject and may best be learned "on the job." Hence the late arrival of full-time schools and the early insistence on evening classes with their accompanying miseries, with the odd summer school thrown in for intellectual makeweight. The profession suffered from the lack of status accorded to one with a recognised training programme. Full-time schools are still not favourably regarded by all members of the profession. Examinations continue to be geared to the idea that practical techniques and professional skills are the main end of library education and so, although full-time schools with their greater potentialities for concerted study, for advanced work and for producing new ideas, have increased since the war, still the content of that education, as far as the examination syllabus goes, is very far from the ideal of professional education. Far from being in the vanguard of professional thought and discussion, the schools are still tagging along at the heels of the examination syllabus.

As well as the teaching of professional skills, professional understanding should be inculcated into the recruit, and this is only rather sketchily dealt with. Such a subject is the backbone of other professional training: the student at the Institute of Education is not taught how to mark a class register nor how to distribute morning milk; nor is he required to know what sort of furniture is best for classrooms. Rather he is taught a great deal about the history, theory and philosophy of education and also takes a wide comparative course in education, say in Europe or throughout the English-speaking world.

Of course, librarians themselves are not always agreed on the philosophy of their own subject, for some think it is a technical subject and find anything else unnatural. But it is just this highly practical attitude which keeps the librarian in his present somewhat lowly and indeterminate status, and the general impression of librarians' work will continue to be limited to the tasks of issuing books, collecting fines and shelving books. Those who insist on the practical nature of librarianship may find one day that it will be done by photocharging and the B.N.B. Cynicism apart, unless professional education succeeds in giving an interpretation of librarianship in its wider context it cannot hope to attract the more scholarly elements needed. By wider context I mean the understanding of the importance of books and libraries in the history of civilisation and of the human spirit. We should understand how they help to maintain the freedom of the individual and add to his self-education and self-expression, this in turn contributing to the well-being of society. Libraries are vital in extending the frontiers of knowledge and in preserving the wealth of the past. They represent our heritage and our future—they have rightly been described as "the power plants where ideas in printed language are kept ready for use."

Is there enough emphasis laid on this fundamental part of training, and is a careful enough selection made of the candidates able to absorb and interpret such ideas? That two schools of thought exist is obvious in the co-existence of the training offered by schools preparing for the L.A. examinations and that of the London School of Librarianship for its own Diploma. There the approach is more scholarly, though some may murmur more precious, but at least the course does demand some original work as well as giving more attention to the early history and

theory of librarianship. Moreover, there is complete integration between the course and the examination, in contrast to the perpetual perplexity of students and tutors alike in working for the L.A. examinations.

One obvious shortcoming of the course for the L.A. Registration examination gives rise to the old adage that a librarian knows how to classify a book, how to catalogue it, to shelve it, and even has a fair idea how to print and bind it, in short, everything except how to read it. No heed is paid to the study of book evaluation and all that it means, assessing a book, judging it as information or literature, acknowledging its style and authority, tearing the heart out of a book—that is the very essence of librarianship and although a librarian specialises in not specialising, it is sad how far one can feel from the world of books while on such a course. If the syllabus were not wedded to the amassing of facts, more time might well be spent on book work, evaluation, criticism and discussion of various fields of study, as well as the preparation of individual book lists and bibliographies.

It seems at least that a higher minimum level of attainment might be prescribed for the entrant to professional training; this would surely raise the status of the profession by attracting more highly qualified persons and the examinations and teaching could then be more closely integrated as there would be a more uniform standard of attainment among aspirants to the profession. It is true that salaries are inadequate at present to attract many candidates of requisite calibre, but an increase in salaries is, I suggest, linked closely with an increase in status. It is also true that at present Registration and Final examinations progressively weed out those capable of taking further educational punishment but a higher educational standard would then approach more nearly that of the United States where qualified librarians take degrees in library science. I am not advocating following the American system in detail, where universities are notoriously prodigal of their degrees, but at least there is something to be said for attaching library schools to universities and ensuring two years' full-time study, as well as putting the training on a sound footing. But to do this means building up what Roy Stokes has called a recognised core of study.

Perhaps the simplest way of dealing with this problem is to state what has been obvious, but which is seldom openly acknowledged: the distinction between professional and non-professional grades in library work only draw the line of demarcation even higher than usual. The non-professional grades could then be given some training and education in the routine skills and grounding of library practice, while more highly qualified candidates are selected for a two or more year course in librarianship leading to an examination at honours degree level. This would mean that at last the more highly qualified student would not be turned away from library work because of the routine work which means low status and a correspondingly low salary. Thus, the distinction between those who could do the routine work of the library and those whose administrative ability and powers of understanding fitted them for the higher posts would be made, and there would no longer be this ambiguous and somewhat absurd situation that any library junior with three passes in General School Certificate is a potential chief librarian.

The great librarians of the past were often men of the highest culture and this was before the days of formal training; too often now the accent seems to be on administrators and technicians. A modern intellectual has stressed the need to restore the ideal of the librarian as a scholar and a custodian of culture. Let us see that even if we cannot always approach that ideal, we do not, at any rate, walk in the opposite direction.

# Four Thousand Recommended Books

K. R. McColvin

Stock Editor, Lambeth Public Library.

When the last edition of Whitaker's Reference Catalogue was published, there were approximately 100,000 books in print. Even allowing for the fact that books go out of print quicker now than before the war, for the considerable remaindering policy and for the demise of Simpkin Marshall, it is probable that this figure is near enough correct now after five years of publishing at the rate of over 18,000 titles every year.

There is then a corpus of books, good, bad and indifferent, cheap and expensive, from which the librarian can draw for stock, and which should be considered not only during the process of stock revision, but every time it is necessary to select a book. It is essential that libraries make a serious effort to relate their daily book purchases to their actual holdings. Of course there is little need to do this for a great many new travel, war, and biographical books. To a large extent these titles select themselves, but these are not the only books one buys. Innumerable books on elementary chemistry, photography, gardening, etc., are available, and many new titles are issued each year. How do you find out whether the new title is as good as or better—for your readers—than the titles you have already. Let us, as they say take for instance: French grammars. Every library will have one or two, selected how, nobody knows. Often they are old schoolfriends—Collin's French Grammar is mine. The publication of a new French grammar could well occasion an examination of the stock to see whether the increased number of travellers to France has caused any increased interest in learning French. It has? Good. Clear evidence that three or four more French grammars are needed for the new season. Now what do you do?

It is easy enough to find out if the new book is any good, but it is only rarely that new books are reviewed in relation to other books on the same subject—strangely enough it is more frequently found in reviews of novels: writers are for ever being compared with Graham Greene or Kafka. So how do you find out whether Jones' *Algebra for Everyman*, 1956, is better than earlier attempts at mathematics for the masses by Williams, Brown, and Robinson *inter alia*? You could ask someone whom you think will know—an expert, but you would have to find one and then explain to him exactly what you think your readers want and would use.

The difficulties of this approach are obvious. What about lists of recommended books? These should clear the ground and enable the librarian to say that whatever new books are published, only these of the past need to be compared with them. Three main kinds exist: the supplementary reading list or list of books recommended for further reading appended to a reliable textbook; a list issued by an institution connected with the subject or with the assistance of such an institution; reading lists compiled by public libraries. It would be hazardous to accept the recommendations of any person or institution however learned, without ensuring that they were properly related to the requirements of your readers, but these lists are at least objective and if used carefully, most valuable.

Lists issued by public libraries are a different matter. I would like to make it quite clear that I do not consider it any part of the purpose of the book lists issued by Sheffield, Bethnal Green and many other places to be useful to other libraries. They are published to assist their own

readers and staff, but if they achieve this in one place, one might reasonably assume that they would be of some use to readers in almost any other place.

But, honestly, are these lists of any use to readers anywhere? Most are simply a list: a dozen to a hundred titles without any statement of the principles of selection, or of the degree, kind or standard of the titles. You know, don't you, that the list is often no more than some/all/ a few of the books the library happens to have on some subject or other dreamed up by the lending librarian. Of course these lists serve to attract attention to neglected subjects and they can be given out by untrained assistants when someone asks "Have you anything on . . . ?" I leave it to you to decide whether this is the best way to deal with these matters.

What this really boils down to is that lists of recommended books are a real menace unless they have a clearly stated policy and give notes on the scope and purpose of the books. The lists must be reasonably comprehensive within their field. In these days of national co-operation and regional specialisation there is no harm in recommending a book you haven't got; you can get it. A booklist can break down the barriers by which every library building is confined.

Now, I suppose, I can hardly be expected to greet Dagenham's *Four Thousand Recommended Books*, 3rd ed. 1956, with any great enthusiasm. The fact that it is the third edition indicates that it is thought useful in Dagenham: Mr. O'Leary is not a flogger of dead horses. It is a most interesting book, well worth sixpence and more—I mean that it is worth sixpence to anyone who just wanted a list of books on his subject. He could tear off the bits he didn't want. The choice of books is intelligent and the whole thing is obviously the product of much thought and attention to detail. The book is well printed in good sized type—none of this minute print in double columns for Dagenham—with large clear headings. The layout is clean and attractive, but one or two titles are rather ugly, e.g.

Burghardt,  
H.D. and  
A. Axelrod.

Machine tool operation. 2 vols. illus.  
1953

In particular the layout of the fiction is unfortunate. If the titles had been printed a few more spaces across the page, it would not have been necessary to use a second line in some cases for authors' initials.

It is the introduction I really admire. How many librarians would dare say "The existence on our shelves of important series of books, such as the 'Loeb' classics, must be taken for granted." I will resist the temptation to indulge in the games of "It does not include . . ." and "Notable omissions are . . ." Rather I would like to conclude with two points: firstly the foreword commences "This catalogue is compiled for the general reader." I don't believe there is any such animal. Our readers are all different, different in age, sex and heredity, the object at varying levels and with varying results of innumerable influences and pressures, religious, political and social. Every day their minds are assaulted by radio, T.V. and press with various effects. We must remember that we are dealing with INDIVIDUALS.

Secondly, does a list of general books get us very far? I think not. Each reader needs his own list. The needs of many readers can be met by a combined list which is annotated. A series of lists each devoted to a small field of knowledge is required, either including books for all sorts of readers or only titles suitable for particular readers at particular times. I'm waiting to see a list which contains recommendations of books in large type or basic English.

## Unfair to Blyton

—a review by W. A. SMITH, Plymouth Public Library.

Try as I may, I cannot arouse much enthusiasm or even interest, when confronted by a list of books, no matter the subject, nor how well it is produced. Perhaps this is rather an isolated and misguided view, but to me, irrespective of the story it tells, or the subject it treats, the essence of the book is in its appearance.

This desirable feature, "Appearance," covers books of all shapes, sizes and binding. The Librarian who is used, I almost said "hardened," to the likes and dislikes of his readers, is, through a variety of circumstances, forced to apply an even further narrowing of the field covered by the description of "appearance." By virtue of internal economy, very large books, no matter how well produced, present problems which flash automatically through the mind of the book selector; thoughts such as "Can I afford to bind this book, if necessary—Can I shelf it adequately—Is the casing strong enough to stand up to normal wear and tear—Will it require to be bound before going into circulation." Similarly, the shape of the book is a further refinement of choice, for oblong books, no matter how desirable, are a real trouble to shelf. These are problems not to be easily dismissed, as they represent practical obstacles to normal everyday use. Herein, to my mind, lies the weakness of any list, despite any indication of size that may be given. "Oblong 6½ inches" does not convey a particularly clear picture of a book, and cannot compare with the actual seeing of it.

These are thoughts aroused in my mind following an opportunity to peruse a recent book-list. This is *Books for Young People—Group 1 (Under Eleven)*; a completely revised edition, compiled by the North-Western Branch, under the editorship of Hilda McGill, and issued by the Library Association at 12s. (9s. to members).

There is no intention of detracting from the value of the Book-List, because it does provide a very fine selection of books for that most difficult of all age-groups, the "under elevens." The scope, variety, and mental capabilities contained within this age group are tremendous, and it is at this age that should come the real awakening of the love of books. It is for this reason that certain points came immediately to my mind. On a first glance, it appeared to me that the non-fiction selection had not been given the same care and attention as had the fiction.

From my own experience, I know that there are many more suitable books available for this age group in several of the subjects contained in this list. Topics such as Bible Stories—Lives of Christ—Railways—Ships—Nature Study—History—General Knowledge, to mention but a few. Of actual books there are the *Golden Picture Books*; certain volumes in the *Observer* series; *The Child's Book of Stars* with its many companion volumes; *Puffin Picture Books*, sources of much pictorial information; Foulis's *This Land of Kings*, the history books by R. and E. Power. These are omissions which while crediting the editors with their own reason for non-inclusion, should, I feel, be a *must* for any list aiming to deal fully with this particular age group. Similarly in the fiction selection there must be some reason for the omission of books by such authors as Elizabeth Clark, Geoffrey Higham, F. H. Lee, F. H. Pritchard, Monica Edwards, Mrs. H. C. Cradock, Mrs. A. C. Hann and Ivy Wallace, to mention but a few. I note also the exclusion of the Blytons and, risking the consequences, state quite firmly that certain of her books should have been included, because Enid Blyton does provide that important "some-

thing" that few other writers for this age can produce.

Despite these comments, I would commend the compilers for their work. It is an achievement that I would quite willingly call my own, and anyone using this list as a working tool can be assured that the books really do serve the purpose for which they were written.

**Somebody Loves Us.** Mr. L. G. Prettejohns of Southwark Library, has kindly contributed the following:—

After the excitement caused by Kingsley Amis's portrait of a public librarian, it is encouraging to see a tribute paid to them by another contemporary writer, Neil Bell. In his forthright book *My Writing Life*, published recently by Alvin Redman, he says:—

"There is no trouble they will not take. I do not think the public generally, and young writers particularly, have any idea of the wealth of information that is theirs for the asking in our public libraries. There are at least half a dozen names that should accompany mine, as collaborators, on my title page. Here are three: the late James Ross; W. S. Haugh; the late Frederick Cowles."

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